

Are You Up to Par?

Fitness for Golfers

By Annette M. Zaharoff, MD

Are you ready to improve your golf game and prevent injuries? Working with your pro is one way. It is also important however, to get in shape and learn the importance of physical conditioning in order to optimize what you learn from your pro. PGA and LPGA players have figured that out. As more research information has become available regarding the physical demands of golf, the importance of physical fitness and improved golf performance is clear.

In the next several articles, I will review three basic components of an exercise program designed to meet the physical demands of golf. These will include stretching, strengthening, and aerobic conditioning. Together, these three areas can improve the mobility in your swing as well as improve power and consistency. Not only can a well designed exercise program lower your handicap (no money back guarantee!) but it may also help prevent injuries. The first area to address is stretching.

Stretching

Whether you are a beginner, club champion, or a pro golfer, every golfer will benefit from stretching the muscle groups most involved with the golf swing. The more flexibility your muscles have, the greater range of motion your joints get. The improved mobility helps the mobility of your swing and reduces stress in the muscles in your neck, shoulders, low back, and hips. Especially critical is improving the rotation of your trunk during your swing. Older and less skilled players tend to use less than one half the trunk rotation of younger or more skilled players. This lack of flexibility explains why ability can decrease with age. Golfers may gradually lose the arc of motion that enables the body to transmit maximum velocity to the club head at impact.

With less trunk rotation, the golfer loses club head speed and tries to make up for it elsewhere by “muscling” the ball to generate more speed. Other muscles become more stressed which increase the risk of fatigue and injury.

A good stretching program requires no special equipment. An easy 5 to 6 minutes before you hit your first ball at the range and before the first tee will allow your muscles to loosen up. Since muscles tend to shorten with time unless stretched on a regular basis, your flexibility program should also be performed on your non-golf days.



Program

Ideally, warm up before you stretch. A stationary bike or treadmill will work. Break a mild sweat to warm the muscles up.

Stretch each muscle 2-3 times, holding the stretch 20-30 seconds, without bouncing.

Stretch the right and left sides. Also, stretch between holes as needed to stay loose.

Stretches should include these areas: neck, shoulders, chest, lower back, hips, and legs.

When you are finished golfing, take a few minutes before you hit the 19th hole to stretch again.

Talk to your sports medicine specialist to outline your program and address any special orthopedic issues you may have. You can also visit my website to view some of the exercises mentioned in this article.



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